

on national healthcare budgets, due to loss of productivity," said Sniekers.

In order to tackle the burden of diabetes in Africa, WHO and IDE, with the support of Novo Nordisk, are currently pursuing various activities to combat the disease at all levels. The objectives of the Dakar workshop were to contribute to capacity building in the management of national diabetes control programmes and to update participants with the skills and knowledge required to assess the coverage and quality of care at country level and to outline an improved framework for this assessment.

Currently, there are three main initiatives under development. The *Declaration of Africa on Diabetes* aims to engage governments in African countries, nongovernmental organizations, industry partners, health-care professionals, and national diabetes coordinators in the fight to reduce the impact of diabetes. The draft document, originally prepared in May 2003, will be presented by national diabetes representatives to their national health ministers following peer-review. ■

Potential meningitis tragedy averted

A rare strain of meningitis known as W135 which re-emerged recently in Burkina Faso has been rapidly controlled thanks to the joint efforts of a number of international partnerships, and the rapid availability of stocks of a newly developed vaccine, according to WHO's Global Alert and Response unit.

"At last, we have the tools to contain small outbreaks like this one before they cripple an entire region," said Dr Michael J Ryan, coordinator of WHO's Global Alert and Response unit.

WHO has recently vaccinated around 135 000 people against *Neisseria meningitidis* serogroups W135, A, and C in Nanoro district, Burkina Faso.

The 2002 outbreak of W135 in Burkina Faso resulted in 13 000 people becoming infected, 1500 of whom died before the outbreak burned itself out. This was thought to be largely due to the difficulties faced by laboratories in identifying the disease when it first emerged in Africa two years ago, the lack of experience among field epidemiologists in tracking the disease and the absence of an affordable vaccine.

To address these deficiencies, WHO began galvanizing partnerships to build a "mass intervention delivery system" in the region aimed at combating W135. Laboratory workers and field epidemiologists were trained and supplied with materials so that the strain could be rapidly detected, tracked and confirmed. Regional monitoring was established at WHO's Subregional Multidisease Center in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

At the same time, pharmaceutical partner GlaxoSmithKline developed a new vaccine which was rapidly tested and approved. Following negotiations with WHO, the company priced the vaccine affordably, at one euro per dose (around US\$ 1.8).

Following an urgent appeal issued in September 2003, WHO established an emergency stockpile of the vaccine with funding from the governments of Ireland, Italy, Monaco, the United Kingdom and from Médecins Sans Frontières, the Norwegian Red Cross, UNICEF and private individuals.

The containment of W135 provides an example of the potential that partnerships have in achieving successful public health interventions.

"Every part of the public health network pulled together to build this system," said Ryan. "Humanitarian organizations, industry, international agencies, lab trainers and private contributors have all worked together, and through their combined efforts an enormous tragedy in Africa may have been averted." ■

Vaccination campaign in the Americas kicks off in Haiti

Vaccination Week in the Americas which aims to reach some 40 million people began in Haiti on 24 April 2004. Coordinated by WHO's Regional Office for the Americas (PAHO), in collaboration with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the massive campaign is targeting women, children, the elderly and those living in rural border regions in 35 countries.

Vaccination Week "demonstrates our strong commitment to work together to improve the health of the people of the Americas, especially the children," said Dr Mirta Roses, director of PAHO.

Targets for the immunization effort in Latin America and the Caribbean include some 15 million children, 10 million adults, 10 million people over 60 years old, 1.4 million women of child-bearing age, and 1.7 million people in other risk groups. According to the US Centers for Disease Control, in the US alone, around 1 million children remain inadequately immunized.

Vaccination Week in the Americas aims to highlight the need for routine vaccinations to improve coverage, especially in rural areas, and it also hopes to promote access to health services. Most of the countries are vaccinating against measles, polio, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome; some are also vaccinating against influenza and neonatal tetanus. ■

Fifty-seventh World Health Assembly, 17–22 May 2004

Provisional agenda items:

- HIV/AIDS
- Surveillance and control of *Mycobacterium ulcerans* disease (Buruli ulcer)
- Control of human African trypanosomiasis
- Smallpox eradication: destruction of variola virus stocks
- Eradication of poliomyelitis
- Global strategy on diet, physical activity and health
- Road safety and health
- Health promotion and healthy lifestyles
- Family and health
- Reproductive health
- Health systems, including primary health care
- Quality and safety of medicines: regulatory systems
- Genomics and world health
- Human organ and tissue transplantation